

AN AMBULATORY SCOTSMAN

The Story of JAMES SCOTT

Trevor R Howard

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

James Scott was born in about 1885, reportedly, in Kilsyth, Scotland but appears to have grown up in Greenock.

After joining the Army with the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, James found himself in South Africa. He allegedly bought his discharge (at Bloemfontein) after six years and moved to Durban.

James was working as a crane-driver in Durban docks in 1910, when he decided to walk around the newly created Union of South Africa 'to prove it could be done'.

James would go on to walk 30,000 miles across three continents, taking a total of five years. In between, he would serve during the First World War with the South African Infantry Brigade, getting gassed at Delville Wood, return to the UK and raise a family at Woking, Surrey.

In the Second World War, James served for two years with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC).

This is his story.

ORIGINS

Birth and Childhood

Very little is known for certain about James Scott's childhood. Almost all that is known is from James himself, either from interviews as the basis for newspaper articles or from official forms for which he provided the information. It is possible that he was either ignorant about the exact details of his birth or was sometimes economical with the truth. Family stories say that he was actually born with the surname Anderson.

In the 1921 census, James gives his birthplace as Stirling, Scotland and his age as 35 years and 10 months, which would put his birth at about August 1885. Most other documents and newspaper reports give his birthplace as Kilsyth, Stirlingshire, Scotland. Kilsyth was 11 miles from Stirling (15 miles by road).

When James married Mary Gray in November 1915, the marriage certificate gives his age as 28, putting his birth sometime in 1887. The certificate gives his father as Joseph Scott, a quarryman. In a newspaper article of 1913, reproduced in the *Kilsyth Chronicle*, James is reported as being from Kilsyth and the son of a quarryman.

In October 1939, James crossed from Canada into the USA; on his immigration card he gave his age as 50 (birth 1889). At this same time, he gave his nearest relative as his sister Marion Anderson, Port Glasgow, Scotland.

Two sources give his birthday as 16th August, but with different years.¹ His father, reportedly, was a quarry worker. James's family, again reportedly, moved to Stirling, when he was three years old. However it is likely they ended up in Greenock as James is consistently referred to as a 'native of Greenock' and it is where he returned to after each of his excursions (even if he didn't stay).



Figure 1. Family snap?

This picture, which appeared in the *Daily Herald* in 1933, seems to have been taken in front of a washing line with a floral item hung on it - a family photo?

Assuming it is James, he appears very young, with a fuller head of hair than in the photo of his return to Durban in 1912 (Figure 5).

¹ Various sources give James's year of birth as anything from 1883 to 1894

In the Army

The *Kilsyth Chronicle* article of 1913 (which largely quotes verbatim an article which had appeared in the *Natal Mercury*) states that he served six years in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Later accounts state seven years, which was the standard term (plus a further 5 in the reserves). James himself says that he purchased his discharge in Bloemfontein in 1908.

It is likely that he served from 1902-1908. If he signed up at age 17 or 18, this ties in with a birth in 1885. The 2nd Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders deployed to India in 1892. This was followed by service in South Africa before returning to the UK in 1910. It is likely therefore that James Scott served with the 2nd Battalion.

Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, upon formation in 1881, followed the linked two-battalion system mandated by the Childers Reforms for line infantry regiments, comprising a 1st Battalion derived from the 91st (Princess Louise's Argyllshire Highlanders) and a 2nd Battalion from the 93rd (Sutherland Highlanders). The regimental depot was established at Stirling Castle, which functioned as the primary centre for training, administration, and initial muster of recruits.

Recruitment targeted specific counties in western and central Scotland, including Argyllshire, Stirlingshire, Clackmannanshire, Dumbartonshire, Renfrewshire, and Kinross-shire, drawing predominantly from rural communities where enlistees were shaped by agrarian lifestyles in hilly terrain. These areas yielded men with inherent physical resilience suited to infantry demands.

The 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders deployed to South Africa in late 1899, forming part of the 3rd or Highland Brigade. The Argylls played leading roles in the Battle of Modder River, the Battle of Magersfontein, the Battle of Paardeberg, and in an action at Roodepoort immediately preceding the Battle of Doornkop. After the Boer War they served in Malta and India.

The 2nd Battalion remained in the UK until 1892, when they moved to India. This was followed by service in South Africa before returning to the UK in 1910.



Figure 2. A sergeant in Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders uniform

The 2nd Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were stationed at Poona, India until May 1906. They were then deployed to South Africa and stationed at Pretoria. This, presumably, was James's first time in Africa.

A STROLL AROUND SOUTH AFRICA - 1910-12

Departure

Having been discharged from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, it appears that James Scott worked in the docks at Durban² as a crane driver.

In 1910, James decided to walk right around the newly formed Union of South Africa³. It appears that the motivation was 'to prove it could be done within a certain time'²; as a consequence, James carried with him a log book which he intended to get stamped at the post office in each place he visited.

This was something he would repeat on later hikes.



Figure 3. Map of the Union of South Africa



Figure 4. Hiking kit

When James set off, on the 15th November 1910, there were just a few friends gathered to see him off.

James travelled light. A 50-pound pack contained a small tent, sleeping bag, change of clothes and a few essentials; a small kit-bag, 2-pint water bottle, service revolver and he carried a rifle. A pedometer on his belt kept track of the distance covered.⁴

Throughout the journey, James would earn money by barbering (he had apparently been a military barber in the army) and lecturing at moving picture theatres (presumably having more to say, as he got further along the journey).

James set off from Durban, heading north along the coast, through Zululand and Swaziland (now Eswatini). He then crossed into Portuguese East

² This came to light in 1939, when James was walking through Canada. When he arrived at Brooks, Alberta, a Mr Harry Philpott, a resident, joined a group of men talking to him and stated that he knew a man who had walked around S Africa 'just to prove it could be done'. Harry and James had worked together at the docks in 1910. [*Calgary Herald*, 14 June 1939]

³ The Union of South Africa was a British Dominion and, later, a Commonwealth realm in southern Africa from 1910 to 1961. It was the historical predecessor to the present-day Republic of South Africa. It came into existence on 31 May 1910 with the unification of the Cape, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange River colonies. It included the territories that were formerly part of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State.

⁴ Almost all of the details of James's journey come from an article published in the *Natal Mercury* in October 1912, based on his infrequent reports and an interview on his return

Africa (Mozambique) and, keeping close to the coast, headed for Beira.

From Beira, James headed inland towards Mashonaland (an area of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)). As he entered Macequece (Massi Kessi), a town just before the Southern Rhodesian border, he was arrested by two policemen. James was placed in leg-irons at the police station and held for two hours. Not speaking Portuguese, James believed he had been arrested for carrying a rifle without a licence. His native servant disappeared⁵. Later an English hotel-keeper arrived. It transpired that James had been arrested for murder. Fortunately, the hotel-keeper was able to prove that James was not the wanted man.

James tells us that wherever he encountered white people, he would be provided with bed and board. Native tribes, on seeing his rifle, would encourage him to kill game for them and they would feed him in return.

Penetrating into Rhodesia, James had numerous incidents with wild life, encountering pythons and lions on several occasions. Ten miles from Broken Hill, emerging from the brush, he was faced with a family of five lions just feet ahead. He was contemplating shooting them when his native servant⁵ signalled him to stop and lower the rifle. Moments later, the three cubs turned away and strolled into the bush. The two adult lions stood for a couple of minutes glaring at him and then followed the cubs.

During this time, James suffered several bouts of fever (malaria?) which laid him up for weeks. He eventually turned south and, having viewed Victoria Falls, entered the Transvaal; between Sulphur Springs and Messina Copper Mines, he achieved his highest daily rate of 44 miles.

James reached Johannesburg on Christmas Day 1911. He states that his reception was not warm and he had to make do with his own company.

James went on through the Orange Free State (Lesotho) and, from there, he aimed for the Cape. In Cape Town, James was entertained by the Scottish Associations there. Lieutenant-Colonel Stamford, commanding the Duke of Connaught and Strathern's Own Capetown Highlanders, presented him with a Highland uniform. On his return from the Cape to Durban, he wore this upon entering all the towns along his way.

From Cape Town, James travelled via the Cape coast line: through Basutoland, back into the Free State, and into Natal.

Return

James completed his circuit of the Union on Saturday, 29 September 1912 when he arrived back at Durban. Over 4000 people assembled to welcome him home.

⁵ This is one of only two mentions of anyone accompanying James. It is not clear whether this person was a porter and/or guide or interpreter, nor for how much of his journey James had someone with him.

On the previous Friday night, James had put up at Pinetown, some ten miles north-west of Durban, where he gave a lecture in the local hall. Leaving early on the Saturday morning, James kept his friends informed of his location by telephone. At 2 pm he began his entry into Durban,



Figure 5. Triumphant return to Durban

The dog, an Irish terrier named Jack, was the fourth to accompany Scott on his walk, for the final 1000 miles – the first three having succumbed after being bitten by the tsetse fly

James's circuit of the Union had taken 683 days; he had covered 10,300 miles at an average of 15 miles per day. He had worn out 11 pairs of boots (some accounts say 14); these were provided to him by a Durban firm, in return for him advertising their company.



Figure 6. Approximate route around South Africa
(anti-clockwise from Durban)

SETTING OFF FOR LONDON

Departure

It seems that James now had an incurable case of wanderlust. No sooner had he completed his circuit of the Union of South Africa, than he started planning his next walk. This time he intended to walk across the entire continents of Africa and Europe – from Durban to London.

A Mr William Gibson wrote a letter to *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*⁶ with a proposal by Scott to conduct the walk if commissioned to take films along the way. It is not known if such a commission was forthcoming.

Scott, like *Oliver Twist*, is, however, asking for more. He is ready and willing to walk right across the sub-continent to Cairo, and thence through the Balkans and across Europe to London, provided a firm of manufacturers will commission him to take films of unusual scenes in the Dark Continent for them. He will be accompanied by an expert camera man. Scott's *bona fides* are absolutely vouched for by our correspondent. If any firm is anxious to take advantage of this somewhat unusual proposition, I shall be pleased to put them in communication with Mr. Gibson.

* * *

Figure 7. Proposal in *The Kinematograph*



J. SCOTT. J. ARMSTRONG.

Figure 8. Scott and Armstrong
This picture was published in the *Hawick News*. It appears that the names of the two men were transposed and that Armstrong is actually the one on the left



Figure 9. James Scott, 1913

Pictured in front of a map of Africa & Europe, showing the intended route

⁶ *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, 2 January 1913

On this walk, James was joined by a friend, John Armstrong. This fact, although mentioned, was glossed over in most accounts – other than that which appeared in the *Hawick News* on 4th July 1913 (the newspaper of John Armstrong's home town).

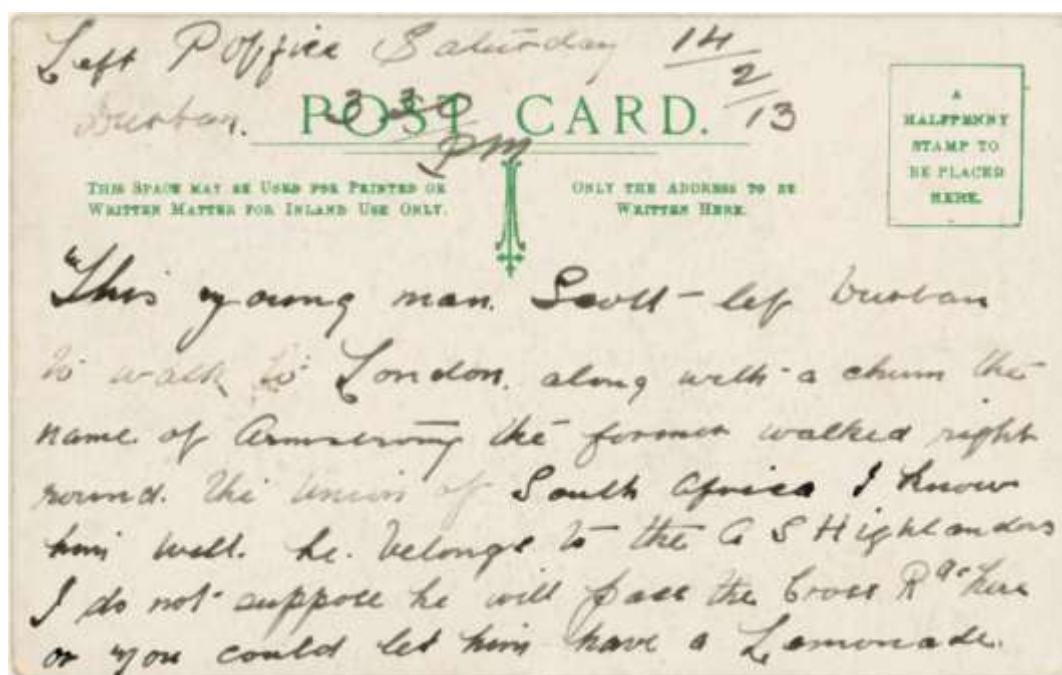


Figure 10. Postcard, 1913

A large crowd reportedly gathered outside the Town Hall to see them off. They set off from the Post Office, opposite, at 3.30 on the afternoon of Saturday 15th February 1913. After walking for some six miles, they were entertained at Red Hill, by a Mr G Stracker and M H Elliott.⁷

It is possible that the walk was sponsored to a limited extent by the *Natal Mercury* newspaper, who published the postcard shown in Figure 9 & Figure 10 and who had printed progress reports from his previous walk.

There was very little reporting of the two men's progress after the initial send-off. It is unclear how far they got before abandoning the enterprise. The trip was presumably called off because of the growing unrest in Europe and the subsequent outbreak of war in July 1914.

In the early 1920s, in England, James gave talks captioned '17,000 miles through Africa'; this suggests that they walked about 6,000 miles (added to the 10,000+ miles that James did on his first walk).

⁷ *Berwickshire News* 25 March 1913

WORLD WAR I

Rhodesia Regiment

James states that, in 1914, he joined the 1st Rhodesia Regiment.

The 1st Rhodesia Regiment was formed in October 1914, initially consisting of 20 officers and 500 soldiers. It was sent to the Cape where it took part in the South West Africa Campaign, under General Louis Botha. The campaign was brought to conclusion in July 1915 when the governor of German South West Africa capitulated to General Botha.

The Regiment was disbanded later that month.



Figure 11. Rhodesia Regiment in Cape Town 1914

South African Infantry Brigade

The Imperial Government requested South Africa to provide further troops for service in other theatres as early as April 1915. As a consequence, the 1st South African Infantry Brigade was formed for service in Europe under command to Brigadier General H T Lukin.

The South African 1st Infantry Brigade was an infantry brigade of the army of the Union of South Africa during World Wars I and II. During World War I, the brigade served as a British formation in Egypt and on the Western Front, most famously in the Battle of Delville Wood.

The 1st South African Infantry Brigade was recruited at Potchefstroom in August and September 1915 for service overseas. It comprised four battalions (or regiments) of infantry. In order to render these battalions as representative as possible, they were designated as follows:

- 1st South African Infantry Regiment (Cape of Good Hope Regiment)
- 2nd South African Infantry Regiment (Natal and Orange Free State Regiment)
- 3rd South African Infantry Regiment (Transvaal and Rhodesia Regiment)
- 4th South African Infantry Regiment (South African Scottish Regiment)⁸

The brigade arrived in the UK in the third week of October; it was quartered at Bordon in Hampshire, where, for the next two months, they underwent training.

⁸ 4th South African Infantry Regiment was commanded by Lt Col F A Jones, DSO.

In December 1915, the brigade was deployed to Egypt where it, together with other Imperial forces, engaged the Senussi supported by the Ottoman Turks. The campaign was successfully concluded and, by 20th April 1916, the Brigade disembarked at Marseilles in France to enter the European theatre of War.

Delville Wood

On 10th July 1916, B and D Companies of the 4th South African Infantry Regiment relieved the 2nd South African Infantry Regiment in Bernafay Wood. On 11th July Lt Col F Jones, OC of the 4th South African Infantry Regiment, was killed by a shell as he emerged from his dug-out in Bernafay Wood. This loss of a battalion commander vividly impressed the fact that the war was no respecter of persons. The carnage among the rank and file was yet to follow.

It should be noted that, whilst B and D Companies were engaged in Bernafay Wood, A and C Companies of the 4th South African Infantry Regiment had been involved, from 9th July, in the fighting for Trones Wood.

Between 15th and 20th July 1916, the Brigade consisting of 3,153 men, entered Delville Wood, a tactically important salient protruding into the German second line. They were subjected to an onslaught of such unrelenting and unmitigated violence that the wood itself disappeared, shattered and sundered by the ferocity and intensity of the artillery bombardments of friend and foe alike. Having expended their ammunition, the men resorted to hand to hand combat. The German artillery used gas shells as well as high explosive.

The 4th SAI emerged from the Battle of Delville Wood with 4 officers and 38 other ranks.



Figure 12. Fighting in Delville Wood⁹

‘Savage Hand-to-Hand Fighting With Bomb and Bayonet in Delville Wood’

“ ... Delville Wood had disintegrated into a shattered wasteland of shattered trees, charred and burning stumps, craters thick with mud and blood, and corpses, corpses everywhere. In places they were piled four deep. Worst of all was the howling of the wounded. It sounded like a cattle ring at the spring fair.” —German officer

“The ghastliness of the place has left its mark upon the minds of many men who are not troubled much by the sights of battle. Those slashed tree, naked trenches, and smoking shell-holes build up a nightmare that men will dream again.” —Philip Gibbs

Repatriation

Sergeant James Scott was wounded on the 16th July; he was invalided home and sent to Richmond Park Hospital. James was discharged from hospital on the 4th August.

In early 1917, the 1st Bn South African Infantry Reserve Brigade moved into Inkerman Barracks. The barracks became the UK depot for the South African Infantry Brigade and units of the 1st Bn, 2nd Bn and South African Scottish Bn were based there until their eventual departure in January 1919. James was employed as an instructor. He was discharged from the army in January 1919.

For the next fifteen years, James seems to have worked as a bus driver: Firstly for Frank Mills in St John’s and lastly for The Greenock Motor Company in Greenock, Scotland.

⁹ <https://www.delvillewood.com/bienvenue2.htm>

FAMILY

Meeting Mary

The South African Scottish Regiment had arrived in the UK sometime in the third week of October 1915. They proceeded to Bordon Camp in Hampshire, where they underwent training for two months.

A month later, on 20th November, James Scott, 30, married 19 years old Mary Gray at All Saints Church, Headley. In the 1911 census, Mary, then aged 15, was in service in Cromer, Norfolk. In 1915, she was presumably staying with her uncle, Robert Tidey¹⁰ (who lived in Headley), when she met James.

The South African Scottish deployed to Egypt in December 1915. The next time Mary saw James was almost certainly when he was invalided home following the Regiment's involvement in the battle of Delville Wood.

Woking

James and Mary's first child, a daughter named Daphne Jessie Scott, was born in, St John's, in June 1917.

By 1918, Mary's parents, Dennis and Sarah Gray had moved to Woking. Dennis and Sarah and James and Mary were living at Orchard Nursery (aka Victoria Orchard) in Robin Hood Road, St John's. Also with them were Mary's sisters, Hilda & Dorothy.

In September 1918, James and Mary had their second daughter, Hilda Dorothy Scott.

James took his family, including the two young girls, on a trip to South Africa in 1919. It is uncertain when they left England, but they returned aboard the *RMS Llanstephan Castle*, from Durban arriving at Southampton on 2nd December 1919.

Over the next couple of years, James gave travel lectures, on his walks across Africa, illustrated by slides from his own photographs.



Figure 13. Advertisement for travel lecture,
Woking News & Mail 11 February 1921

¹⁰ Robert Tidey had married Mary's aunt, her mother's sister, Emma Chaplin

In August 1921, Mary gave birth to twins – a girl, Marion Mary Scott, and a boy, Dennis Alexander Scott. Unfortunately, Marion died after 8 months, in April 1922.

It was shortly after this that James and Mary's marriage began to fall apart. Mary and James separated at least a couple of times. Mary's movements are a little difficult to follow after the 1921 census. She was not eligible to vote until she was 30, which was not until 1925. In 1926, she was registered to vote, her residence being at Maybury Hill, Maybury Hill. In 1927 and 1928, she was back with James at Victoria Orchard.^{11,12}

In 1927, Dennis and Sarah left Victoria Orchard and moved into Laurel Cottage in Church Road; Hilda presumably went with them – she is there the following year (the first year she was registered to vote).¹¹

Break-up

In 1929, Mary was registered to vote at an address in Gloster Road, Old Woking.¹¹ By this time, it seems that James and Mary were irreconcilable. There is no record of a divorce (which would have been very expensive in those times).

In late 1929, James returned to Scotland, apparently to live in Greenock, taking his and Mary's children with him. Between 1929 and 1931, he was working for the Greenock Motor Company.

In 1930, Mary was living with her sister, Dorothy (by then married to Arthur Thurley), in College Road, Goldsworth. By 1931, Dorothy and Arthur had moved to Herbert Crescent in Knaphill but Mary was not with them.¹¹

¹¹ *Surrey, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1962: Farnham District*

¹² The electoral register for each year was compiled some months beforehand. So, an appearance in the 1927 list would indicate a residence in perhaps Aug-Oct 1926.

LONDON TO CAPE TOWN - 1933-37

James, by 1933, had itchy feet again. As his children were then sufficiently old enough, not to need him (16, 15, and 12)!, he decided in 1933 to walk from London to Cape Town. This was, essentially, the same walk he had started, twenty years earlier, in 1913, but in reverse.

James had been employed as a bus driver in Greenock but was apparently then unemployed¹³ and his stated motivation for the walk was to find work in Durban, South Africa. The UK press reporting his departure said that he was then living in Woking.

In later interviews, during his walk, James describes himself as then being a widower (a better image than his actual status of being divorced or separated).

James did not have the funds for the trip and it became apparent he would need to rely upon the generosity of others. Mess^{rs} Black & Sons of Greenock agreed to supply him with a tent, sleeping bag, groundsheet and haversack, free of charge. A St John's resident signed a guarantee to pay the expenses should it be necessary for James to return within the next two years, thus enabling him to obtain a passport.¹⁴

James also needed money for expenses entailed in crossing Europe. Two Woking business men came forward to help. Mr F C Iverson allowed James to be introduced to the audiences at his Astoria Cinema and the Plaza, where collections were taken. Mr Somerfield, the club secretary, allowed a similar collection to be made at the Railwaymen's Club. Thus James left London with about £12 in his pocket.¹⁴

The *Woking Review*, to whom James would send updates of his journey, started a campaign asking the public for donations. It is from articles in this publication that most details of James's adventures come.¹⁵

Departure

At noon on 1st October 1933, James set off from the Houses of Parliament, having first been seen off from the Mansion House by Sir Percy Greenaway, the Lord Mayor of London.

¹³ During his walk to Cape Town, he claimed that he was unable to find work in Greenock, and rather than be a burden on his children decided to find work further afield. Later he dropped the story about his children and stated that he had not wanted to draw the 'Dole'. When walking through the United States, he claimed that as a result of being gassed in the first World War (he was), his health was poor and doctors had advised him to get an outside job or he would not live for long (5 months and 6 months are quoted in numerous accounts); this he claims was his motivation for his hiking. Whilst there is doubtless some truth to this, it seems unlikely that, if he was ill enough to die within months, he would be fit enough to walk from London to Cape Town.

¹⁴ *Woking Review* November 1933

¹⁵ From this time on, all newspaper reports referred to James as 'Jock', which is how he now invariably signed his letters and reports.



Figure 14. A farewell in London



Figure 15. Departing London
(clock tower containing Big Ben
can be seen in the background)

James was carrying two letters: one from General Sir Ian Hamilton for the Colonel Commanding the Capetown Highlanders, the other from the chairman of the Woking Council to the Mayor of Cape Town. He obviously had an art for self-promotion.

He was also (again) carrying a log book, which he was to get stamped at the post office of every place he visited and signed by some official. Sir Percy's was the first signature.

Europe

James set off for Dover and then took a ferry across to France. On route, he had planned to visit (amongst others): Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Vienna, Constantinople (Istanbul since 1930), Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Khartoum, Livingstone and Johannesburg. This route was amended (probably before he departed), to divert around Germany and Austria, to the west and south, and traverse through Milan.

From Calais, James followed the coast to Boulogne before heading inland towards Paris. Upon arrival, James was besieged by reporters and photographers, which continued until he departed. The streets were lined with people to see the 'mad Britisher'. The French police guided him through the city and set him on the road to Amiens [this appears to be a detour and it is not clear why he did not head to Amiens from Boulogne and then head for Paris].

James headed south from Amiens and, keeping up a steady 30 miles per day, he reached Lyons, having then covered 600 miles.

From Lyons, James headed for Milan. He reached the French-Italian border at Brancon. The following day he was stopped by the Italian police and asked to submit to a search; they confiscated his camera saying that for military reasons it was not permitted to take photographs whilst travelling through Italy.

As James neared Milan, he was forced to turn back owing to the Alps being impassable because of heavy snow. James had to retrace his steps and turn south to Nice, from where he would attempt a different route to Milan.

James seems to have been sadly under-prepared for this journey. He had embarked on it with no money to buy equipment or fund his journey through Europe. He seems to have underestimated the effects the political turmoil in Europe would have on him. By leaving when he did, at the beginning of October, he was attempting to cross the Alps in the late autumn/early winter. His experience of walking around South Africa twenty years earlier appears to have given him an over-optimistic view of the hospitality he would receive from strangers on his way (especially considering he could not speak the local languages).

Whilst retracing his steps, James lost his helmet when it was blown from his head and over a precipice. Later, he himself was caught by a violent gust and carried bodily along. Fifty miles from Nice, the road was also impassable, necessitating a delay of several days. He eventually arrived at Nice on 21st November half dead from cold and hunger. He rested for just one day before departing for Genoa. You have to admire his fortitude.

After a trek along the Riviera, James reached Genoa on 27th November. Here he rested for several days before once more heading for Milan. Once again, snow blocked his way and he had to retrace his steps, for 25 miles, and go via Pisa.

After finally arriving at Milan, where he found letters and parcels from readers of the *Woking Review*, James discovered that the roads via Trieste, Belgrade and Istanbul were impassable. He thus decided to change his plans and go down through Italy. He planned to spend Christmas Day in Rome where he hoped to get an audience with Mussolini.

James went back through Pisa and after leaving there had to endure more bad weather. His predicament in the cold was made more severe by the fact that he had neither coat nor hat! On one night, in his tent, James kept a pack of wolves at bay by beating his frying pan with a spoon.

From Pisa, James passed through Florence, Perugia and Forni before arriving at Rome, where he spent Christmas sightseeing. Mussolini was out of town.

Leaving Rome, James headed for Naples. From the south of Italy, he planned to go to Malta and then cross the Mediterranean to Tunis. He used the last of his money to send it.

In February 1934, James sent a cable to the *Woking Review*; It read 'Send money at once – stranded – Jock.'

James had crossed from the mainland to Palermo, Sicily, and made his way to Syracuse. He needed money to pay for his passage to Malta.

There was a strong possibility of his being sent home but he met the captain of a cargo boat who took pity and offered him a free passage to Malta. However, as the boat was bound for Tripoli and the captain was willing to take him, James changed his plans again and decided to continue his journey via Cairo.¹⁶

Figure 16. *Woking Review*
April 1934

Until now the response to our appeal for small donations to enable Jock to purchase a rifle and a camera when he reaches Cairo has been very disappointing, and we sincerely hope that readers will fill in the coupon below and send it with their postal orders or cheques to reach us not later than the sixth of April to enable us to send it on in time to reach him at Cairo.

COUPON.
Jock Scott Fund.

Name

Address

Amount enclosed £ s. d.



Figure 17. Planned and actual routes London to Cairo

On landing at Tripoli, in March, James was faced with the prospect of travelling through nearly 800 miles of desert. He expected to do the approximately 560 miles from Tripoli to Benghazi in six weeks. It would then take about another six weeks to reach Cairo.

¹⁶ This had been the original plan after travelling down through Turkey. When James had previously altered his plans and chosen to go through Italy, he had perhaps decided on a more westerly route through Africa. More likely, the reporting is confused and, from Malta, he had intended to land closer to Cairo.

James eventually reached Cairo in June 1934.

Cairo & the Middle East

On his arrival in Cairo, the Sudan Government advised James not to attempt to travel through Sudan, the journey being impossible on foot. He hoped to find a way through Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). This was not possible.¹⁷

James took a job, in Cairo, as Assistant Works Superintendent to the Egyptian General Omnibus Company; his intention being to stay in Cairo only as long as it took to earn enough money to buy a rifle and equipment.

James left his job in Cairo, apparently without purchasing a rifle [it is later reported that he had walked 6,000 miles armed with nothing more than a pen-knife]. He followed the course of the River Nile to Luxor and then Shellall. At Shellall he was again told that the route he planned to take to Wadi Halfa was impassable on foot. Regardless, James decided to make the attempt; he estimated the distance to be some 400 miles.

After just 20 miles he was faced with a sheer precipice. An Arab helped him to get across. He was able to continue by wading and swimming across ravines which had filled with water owing to the Nile floods. James was then stung by a scorpion and would have died but for the kindness of the Nubians who inhabited the villages. He lay on the verge of death for two weeks.

James eventually arrived in Wadi Halfa, where he was informed that he was the only European to complete the journey on foot. He was preparing to continue to Khartoum when he was told that the Government had refused to allow him to continue on foot and must go by rail and boat. The cost would have been £15. He was given a letter from the Uganda Government informing him that he must have a sum of £60 in cash as security before they would allow him to enter Uganda.

James was forced to return the 1000 miles to Cairo. The authorities gave him free accommodation on the boat and train.

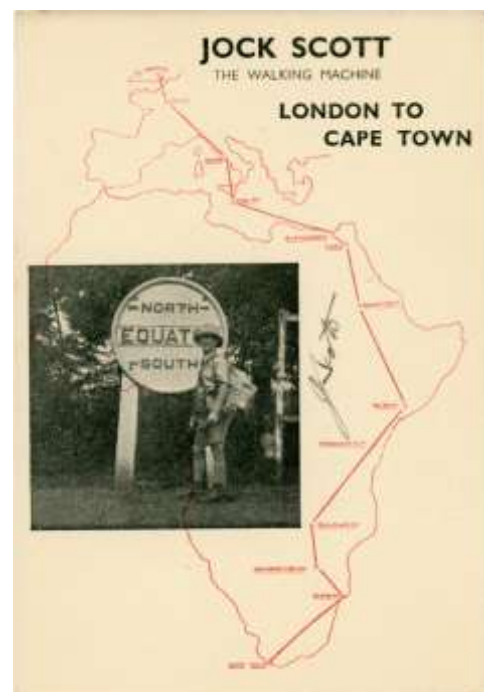


Figure 18. Postcard c1936

¹⁷ The Second Italo-Ethiopian War, also referred to as the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, was a war of aggression waged by Italy against Ethiopia, which lasted from October 1935 to May 1936. In Ethiopia it is often referred to simply as the Italian Invasion. Throughout 1937 and 1938, Ethiopian resistance forces revolted against the Italian rule to such extent that the Italians could not control areas of up to 30 miles around most major towns.

From Cairo, in November 1934, James started out on another route through Abyssinia. Nothing was heard from him for three months. However, in March 1935, the *Woking Review* received the following: 'Still alive, laid up with fever in the Sinai desert. Endured terrible times. Jaffa next call. Will rest a little. I don't know where to break through, being stopped at every attempt.'

After reaching Jaffa, James realised that his only realistic hope of getting through was by going through Sudan, which meant he would have to get a job to earn the necessary money.

Hearing about a job in Iraq, he set off and on arrival was amazed to learn that his boss would be a Mr J E Nicholls, a Woking man who was proprietor of Mess^{rs} Niccols & Sons [sic] of Chertsey Road and was now working for Balfour, Beatty and Co. James was given a job in Kut, in charge of 'caterpillar tractors', excavating a canal.

After four months, James resumed his journey to Cape Town and retracing his steps, found himself once more at Wadi Halfa. He had to take the Nile steamer to Khartoum and then on to Juba.

In the last week of August 1936, James walked into the offices of the *Uganda Herald*, in Kampala, having walked from Juba via Torit, Kitgum, Tororo and Jinja.

From Kampala, James retraced his steps to Tororo and then went on to Nairobi before turning south and arriving at Arusha, exactly halfway between Cairo and the Cape, in November.

From Arusha, James headed down through the Rhodesias and on to Johannesburg, which he passed through in April 1937. From there he headed to Durban, a detour, but he obviously had friends there.



Figure 19. At the New Arusha Hotel
Photo taken by Mrs Ellen Thornton,
November 1936

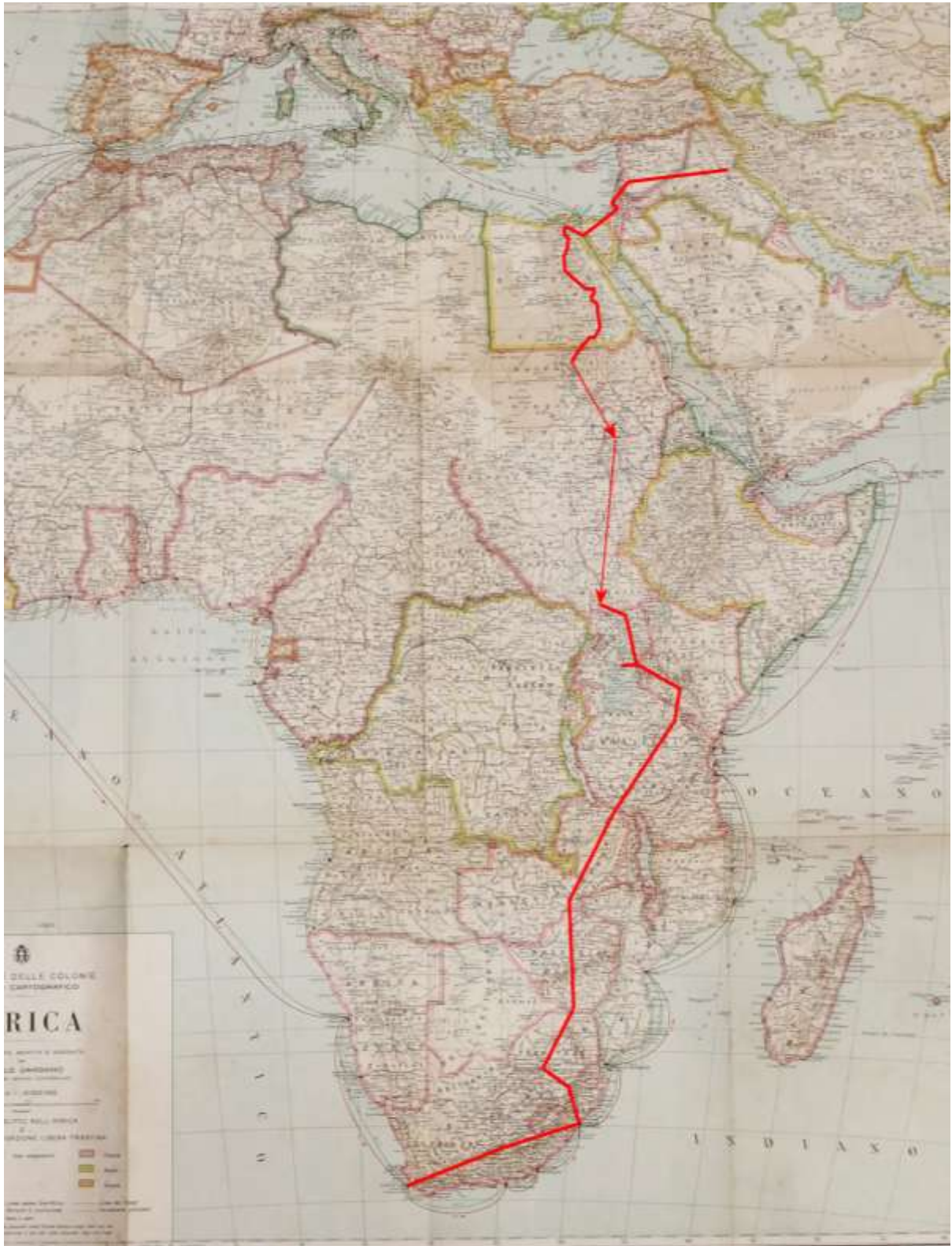


Figure 20. Route(s) through Africa and the Middle East

Back Home

James finally arrived in Cape Town on 7th June 1937. Despite stating that he had originally set off to look for work and having a job supposedly waiting for him, he boarded a ship and arrived back at Southampton on 5th July. He made his way to Glasgow and then on 24th July he walked, accompanied by two pipers, from Port Glasgow to Greenock where a reception was awaiting him.

James returned with a reply to the letter he had taken from General Sir Ian Hamilton for the Colonel Commanding the Capetown Highlanders. It was three years and ten months since the original letter was written – one hopes it wasn't anything urgent.

Figure 21. Back in England, 1937
Handing a postcard to a young fan



ACROSS AMERICA – 1938-39

Departure

Despite (or perhaps because of) the tens of thousands of miles he had covered in the previous four years, James could not settle down. On the 5th January 1938, having walked from Greenock to Southampton, he departed aboard *RMS Aquitania*, bound for the USA. He now intended to walk across America, from New York to California.

He was seen off from Greenock by Bailie¹⁸ Wales in November 1937.

On the passenger list of *RMS Aquitania*, James had given his age as 48. He was probably 52.

James arrived in the US on the 11th January. He wrote regular letters to the *Sunday Mail (Glasgow)* – one account says weekly – and, each month, they published a story based on his letters.

As well as being a ‘correspondent’ for the *Sunday Mail*, James was acting as a publicity agent for the Empire Exhibition^{19,20}. He was also able to cash in on several offers from US firms. Figure 23 shows James shaving, in the reflective window of a New York barber’s shop, using a Packard Lektro-shaver.

James first report came from Philadelphia, published 13th February. James stayed in New York for a couple of weeks, during which time he visited



Figure 22. James with Bailie Wales



Figure 23. Shaving in New York

¹⁸ A bailie is a civic officer in the local government of Scotland. The position arose in the burghs, where bailies formerly held a post similar to that of an alderman.

¹⁹ *The Scotsman* 29 November 1937

²⁰ The Empire Exhibition, held in Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, Scotland, from May to October 1938, was a large scale International Trade Fair. Scotland was slowly emerging from the deep economic crisis of the early 1930s; Sir James Lithgow, chairman of Lithgows Ltd, shipbuilders, Port Glasgow, Inverclyde, Scotland, one of the prime motivators behind the Empire Exhibition, advocated the exhibition in order to boost Scotland's commercial and industrial interests.

a number of tourist spots, including the Empire State Building.

James obtained the signatures of the Mayor of New York and the Governor of New Jersey in his log book. He then started on his journey down the East Coast to Florida on January 24th.

From Philadelphia, James headed to Washington D.C. where he tried to get President Roosevelt's signature, but was not permitted access to the White House. He had to make do with that of Sir Ronald Charles Lindsay, the British Ambassador.



Figure 24. On the way to Richmond

James's second report came from Richmond, Virginia. This was published 13th March and he had by then covered over 400 miles since leaving New York.

From Richmond, he intended to follow the coast to Florida. The next 'major town' being Jacksonville. Before leaving Richmond, he visited the state prison where, he says, he was strapped into the electric chair.

James next report came from the Bland Hotel, Raleigh, in North Carolina. This appeared in the 10th April issue of the *Mail*.



Figure 25. Bland Hotel, Raleigh

James says that he had visited Petersburg, Smithfield, Jamestown and Williamsburgh.

In Raleigh, he added Governor Hoey's name to his log book.

Throughout his journey, James met up with numerous people with Scottish roots (Figure 26); many had sought him out, having heard of his trip.



Figure 26. 'Lassies' from Glasgow & Dundee

James's sixth update was published on 19th June. By then, he had reached New Orleans, travelled 1,945 miles and passed through 95 towns. He was planning a 'detour' 90 miles to get the Governor of Louisiana's signature. His hike through Florida was beset by mosquitoes, rattlesnakes and sun-burn.

Figure 27. At Mobile



Reports in the *Sunday Mail* seem to be several weeks behind James's letters. Leaving New Orleans, he headed for Houston, Texas, which he hoped to reach 'in about three weeks (June 8)'.

²¹ Assuming James had accurately calibrated it, his pedometer was unlikely to be more than $\pm 10\text{-}15\%$ accurate. Even today, the best digital pedometers are only accurate to within $\pm 5\%$ error [Susan D. Vincent; Cara L. Sidman (2003). "Determining Measurement Error in Digital Pedometers". *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science*. 7 (1): 19-24.]

It appears that James's next report went missing. There was no further article in the *Mail* until 28th August. There was no further mention of Houston. James's next missive, came from San Antonio, where James was staying at the Plaza Hotel when interviewed by a reporter from the *San Antonio Light*.

James left San Antonio on Monday 27th June, heading for California. The next stop was to be El Paso, 575 miles on.

James reached El Paso on 26/27 July. He had been on the road for exactly six months and had covered 3,125 miles since New York. It was here that he commented that 'crossing America was not as exciting as crossing Africa'; the chief excitement he said was keeping out of the way of cars.

There was no September report in the *Mail* either, the next appearing on 28th October. James had apparently been refused an extension to his visa, with no reason given. In Tucson, Arizona, he had decided that the United States was simply too tame, so he obtained a tourist visa from the Mexican consulate and started into Mexico.

He had only gone 68 miles past the border when he was told that 'hiking is illegal in Mexico'. He therefore retraced his steps. James continued his journey west, expecting to be kicked out of the country at any moment.

At San Diego (James tells us), he arrived just in time to be invited to a dinner in honour of the flying pioneer, Douglas Corrigan.

James arrived at Los Angeles on 21st September. He had covered 5,020 miles.

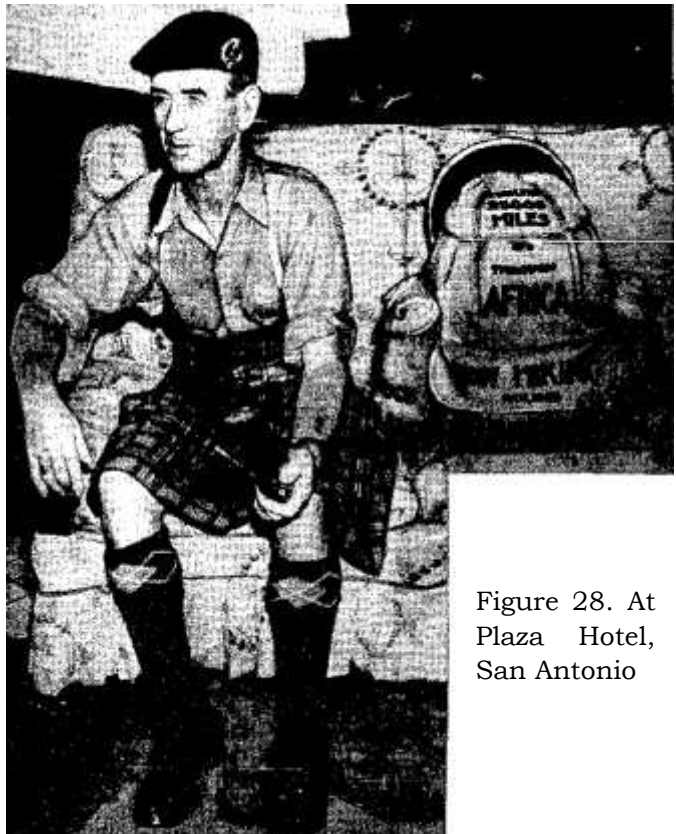


Figure 28. At Plaza Hotel, San Antonio



Jock Scott among Hollywood stars. They are (left to right) standing—Humphrey Brogart, John de Baolo, Jock Scott, Bill Frawley, Douglas Mackinnon; sitting—Brandon Hurst, Johnny Gaulladet, Maurice Luxford, V.C., Andy Clyde; front—Leon Errol.

Figure 29. At Hollywood

After hiking through the Redwood Forest, James spent Armistice (11th November) at Eureka, California, the most westerly point in the USA. He had to take a ride the 50 miles from Dyerville, in order to be there in time. He then went back again to hike the distance so that his pedometer and log book would be consistent. James then headed for Portland, Oregon, some 500 miles north, which he expected to reach in the second week of December.



Figure 30. James's route around USA 1938

James's intent was to walk north to Vancouver and then turn east through Canada and back to New York.

James arrived at Seattle, where he stayed at a Y.M.C.A. hostel, in the beginning of January 1939. There he gave an interview and was photographed, in his hiking kit, at the hostel. That photograph (Figure 31), was reproduced in numerous Canadian newspapers over the next month. James was in Victoria, a small town some 20 miles north of Seattle from 9th to 11th January. It is possible that this is where the hostel was.

Figure 31. James at the Y.M.C.A., Seattle



James crossed into Canada and arrived at Vancouver around the 19th January. He intended to stay for just a few days but was invited to parade the haggis, prior to the toast, at a Burns Night celebration. He ended up leaving Vancouver on 6th February.

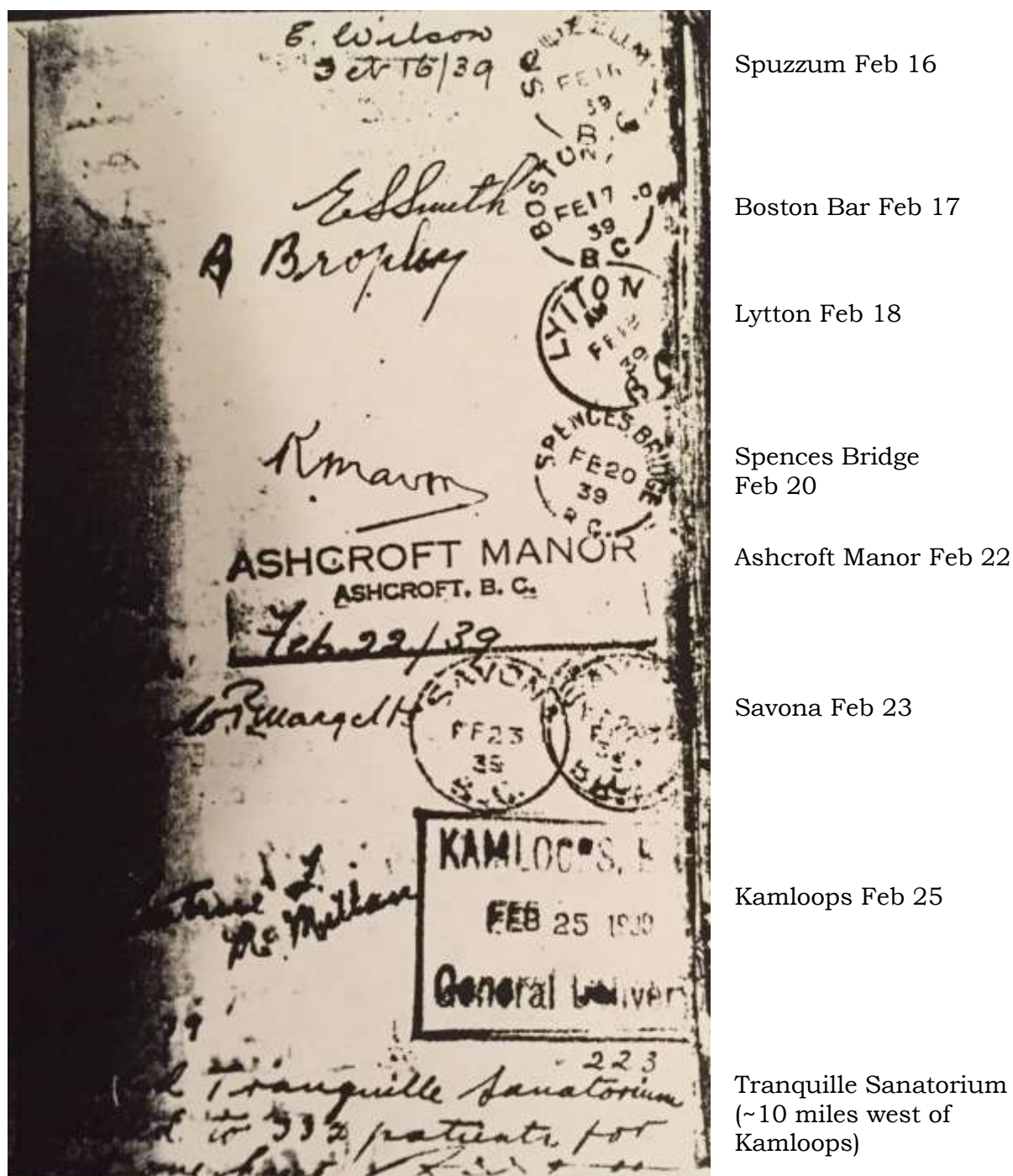


Figure 32. Page from James's log book
(February 1939, travelling through British Columbia)

From British Columbia, James crossed into Alberta. His progress was recorded by snippets which appeared in the local press. He reached Trail on 11th April and Lethbridge on 11th May; passing through Macleod and Nanton, he arrived at Calgary on 11th May, where he stayed with George Walker, president of the St Andrew's Caledonian Society. He had now covered 7,700 miles.

James had hoped to meet King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, who were on tour; unable to do this, he backtracked and hiked to Banff. He was not granted an audience, but his log book was presented to them through their acting private secretary. James returned to Calgary, where he attended the

football match between Scotland and Alberta²² and obtained the signatures of all the Scottish team. During his stay, he was the guest of Alex Sutherland and other natives of Greenock.

On 2nd June, James left Calgary heading for Winnipeg. He entered the town of Brooks on 14th June. A Mr Harry Philpott, a resident, joined a group of men talking to him and stated that he knew a man who had walked around South Africa 'just to prove it could be done'. It transpired that Harry and James had worked together at the docks in 1910.²³

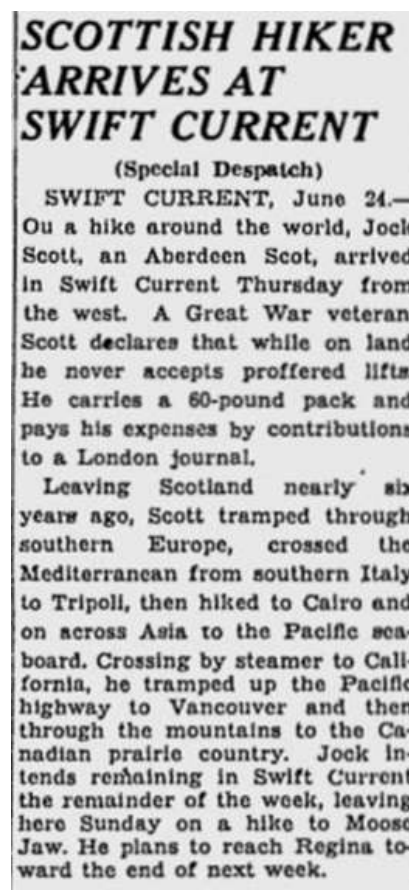
On 22nd June, James arrived at Swift Current, Saskatchewan. The report in the Canadian press which announced his arrival is remarkable for its inaccuracies and a good example of why information obtained from newspapers should be doubled checked whenever possible:

It states that James was from Aberdeen (not Greenock).

It states that he provided contributions to a London journal (Glasgow).

On his trip from London to Cape Town it states, not that he walked from Cairo to Cape Town but that he continued across Asia to the Pacific and that he then arrived in California. It misses that this was a separate journey that had started in New York.

Figure 33. Confused reporting



Leaving Swift Current, James headed for Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan, which he reached on 3rd July. From the town of Caron, he sent a card to *The Leader-Post* newspaper alerting them to his arrival (this is something he apparently usually did).²⁴

He stopped for 3 nights in Regina, staying at the King's Hotel. On 5th July, James gave one of his lectures, under the joint auspices of the St Andrew's Society and Camp Balmoral, Sons of Scotland.



Figure 34. James in Swift Current

²² *Calgary Herald*, 2 June 1939 [Scotland won 7-0]

²³ *Calgary Herald*, 14 June 1939

²⁴ *The Leader-Post* 3 July 1939

James reached Winnipeg, capital and largest city of Manitoba, on the evening of 31st July.

In the second half of 1939, the level of reporting of James's progress dropped significantly. Presumably, news of the war in Europe was taking people's interest and dominating the pages.

On 21st September, James reached Orillia, Ontario (several newspapers reported this, giving his age as 56!).



Figure 35. James's route through Canada, 1939

James re-entered the United States at Niagara Falls on 6th October 1939. On his immigration card (Figure 36), he gives his intent as 'Walk to New York and then take Cunard White Star Line ship to England'. He gave his occupation as 'World traveller'.

PRINCE GEORGE		Transit		694	
MANIFEST		New Niagara Falls, N.Y.		Date Oct. 6, 1939	
Family name		Given name		Accompanied by	
SCOTT		JAMES		None	
694 & 801144		Date and place of birth		Date of entry	
10/3/38		Nia. Falls, Canada.		3-3	
Place of birth (town, county, etc.)		Age		Sex	
Edinburgh, Scotland.		50		Male	
Language or languages		Nationality		Last name, first name, middle, etc.	
English		Scottish		Greenock, Scotland.	
Name and address of nearest relative or friend to notify in case of emergency					
Sister: Marion Anderson 4 Springhill Road, Port Glasgow, Scotland.					
Enter to U.S. from		To		Where	
Yes		1/11/38		Sept. 1938	
Purpose of visit		Touring US		Purpose of visit	
Will walk to New York, N.Y.		and then take Cunard White Star line ship to England.		Purpose in visiting and time remaining	
Never shown		Ever arrested and deported, or excluded from admission		Transit-60 days.	
No		No		No	
Height		Weight		Complexion	
5 ft. 6 in.		160 lbs.		Ruddy	
Hair		Eyes		Distinguishing marks	
Gray		Hazel		None	
Report and date of landing and no. of admission					
New York, N.Y. 1/11/38					
Arrived by		Previous destination		Previous destination, P.I.	
MD		New York, NY 1/11/38		Adm. 6 m.c.	
U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Form 549-10-420					

Figure 36. Immigration card, Canada-US

FINAL DAYS

Return

James returned to Greenock on 17th November 1939. He had hiked for 11,500 miles and obtained stamps from 3,050 post offices for his log book [This seems an awful lot. From the time he left New York until his return to Greenock, was 662 days. This works out at 4.2 per day. In a ten day period in British Columbia (Figure 32), James collected only 7 stamps.]

Figure 37. Back in UK,
November 1939

James tells us that he returned to his old job of driving buses (but not where).



World War II

After the second World War started, James volunteered and apparently served with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), as an ambulance driver.

He served from 1941-43 and states that he was discharged when they found out his true age. If he was indeed born in 1885, then he would have been 55/56 when he volunteered.

Figure 38. James with
his ambulance



In about 1942, James wrote to Mess^{rs} Black & Sons of Greenock, telling them that he was then an ambulance driver. He stated that he hoped the

war would soon be over, as he wanted to walk around Australia and New Zealand - which he thought would take five years. Presumably, planting the thought of more sponsorship.

Black & Sons printed his letter in their company magazine, along with a picture of James in front of a board showing his route around the USA and Canada (presumably erected outside their factory?).



Figure 39. USA-Canada route board

Woking

By 1948 (perhaps as early as 1940), James had returned to Woking where he went to live with Hilda Gray, at 133 Oakway on the Hermitage Estate. He remained there until his death in 1955.

James died in St Peter's Hospital, Chertsey on 4th June 1955. His death certificates states he was 71.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

British Newspaper Archive

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